

# INTERIM

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## CONTENTS

EDITORIAL.....	2
I DIDN'T WANT TO FIGHT YOU.....	Grant H. Redford..... 3
GULF OF GEORGIA.....	Earle Birney..... 7
KOL NIDRE.....	Arthur Gregor..... 8
TOMORROW EVERYTHING WILL BE DIFFERENT.....	Laurie Fish..... 11
THE CAVALIER POETS.....	Lionel Monteith..... 17
LOOKING TOWARDS ASTRAKHAN.....	R. A. D. Ford..... 18
THE NERVE OF SIDNEY HOOK.....	Elgin Williams..... 19
DREAMS OF FAIR WOMEN.....	Carol Hall..... 23
THIS MOMENT.....	H. L. Anshutz..... 24
THEY KILLED SAINT PAUL AT TRE FONTANE.....	Joseph Whitt..... 37
SONG.....	Dell Skeels..... 43
THREE LEAVES SCRATCH ON MY PORCH.....	Fred Hamann..... 44
SOME NOTES FROM A PRACTICAL POESY.....	Kenneth O. Hanson..... 45
BOOKS RECEIVED.....	48

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## THE SHALLOW WELL

Whenever the creative principle loses direction in a people, there is a despairing return from the forms of civilization to the forms of violence. Violence is the phrenetic excuse of a people who lack the courage to follow in the direction of honest reasoning and the ability to live with a sense of the boundless and the indefinable.

Our times call for honest self expression and studied self examination. An age which can kill Mahatma Gandhi is not exactly in a state of renaissance.

More and more, not only national but individual distrust is becoming a dangerously usual part of our contemporary society. Especially is this condition reflected among writers; among the intellectual narcissists of the cliques, who do not write, but are constantly criticising those who do; and outstandingly among people of influence or authority who would further standardize our people, increase the momentum for mass murder, and evangelize documents, rather than a living practice of what the documents stand for.

It is time to redirect the creative principle within each of us, to reembark upon those adventures of the spirit which see the sword for what it is—a sign of destruction, an instrument of inner cowardice, and a surrender to the absolutism which must not envelop us.

We must hold on to that interim of expression, which is ours. Otherwise stagnation starts. The well dries up.

A. W. S.

# GRANT H. REDFORD

## I Didn't Want To Fight You

From the house by the canyon mouth came the crescendo of pain cutting through the gentle air. A red-winged flicker undulated from a tall pine down to a thick limbed cottonwood by the creek below the house. From one of the dead limbs came the machinegun tattling of sound as the bird sought a grub. Then there was silence again. Anyone passing in the dusty road along the stream or riding horseback down from the mountain would have noticed nothing but the peace and the sunlight lumpy with shadows of trees and bushes.

For weeks through the little community had surged the problem of Nancy's pain and her father who stood between her and what aid might have been given. There she lay, her childish beauty outraged by the disease which had disorganized and was destroying her. Sharing the comfort of a harmonious valley, everyone had become angered or fearful at the disproportion which her condition had thrust upon his home. An answer into which they could have expended their frustration would have been a quieting thing.

Nancy had been sick for several days or maybe weeks before she gave up and went to bed; her father had insisted that all was well and had stifled any complaints she had tried to make. Mrs. Rooney, Mike's mother and neighbor to Dale's folks, had called at the Spengler's one afternoon as she returned from the canyon where she had gone to pick huckleberries. She saw Nancy convulsed with pain. "Good heavens!" she cried sympathetically. "What have you tried to do for her? What does the doctor say?"

"We do not believe in doctors," said Mr. Spengler. "God will provide."

"Well, yes I'm sure He will," answered Mrs. Rooney who was a very devout church member. "But He seems to help most, those who help themselves. This girl needs a doctor."

"God will provide," said Mr. Spengler sternly. "And if it is His will that she leave us— So be it. It is not for man to question the ways of God."

"O Father," cried Nancy through her fever-cracked lips while her hands gripped the blue denim quilt. "I don't want to die!"

A warmth and tenderness terrible to see, commanded the man. He eased her twisting fingers. He laid his cheek against the fever of hers. "I know. I know," he whispered. "But we must trust in God." And for the time at least, Nancy was comforted.

That night Mrs. Rooney called the doctor who lived in the next town twenty miles away. He could not go into a home where he was not called, he said. And he was too busy to make the trip, "just in case," as Mrs. Rooney had suggested.

"But we must do something," she said, and everyone in the valley said the same. But nothing was done. No one seemed to know what to do. Sickness had disrupted the harmony of other bodies in the valley. And, regardless of the healing value of the procedures, things were done for the sick. So, even when the patient died, he died and the others lived, clear in their minds: what could have been done had been done.

But the days wore on and nothing was done. Mr. Spengler stood between the will and the act. He was the tough, unbending barrier between the will-to-health and the act which might have established it. Over the party telephones which tied the miles into little bundles of "rings," flowed the talk. "Has anyone heard how Little Nancy is?" they asked. "It is cruel. It is inhuman to let her lie there and suffer."

Mike and Dale and all the children of the valley moved in the gloom of willed and unfulfilled action. They would have done something, almost anything, had they known, or had anyone known, what to do. They gathered together in the cheap little school building which a long time ago had been painted white, and they talked and whispered. Then little by little they forgot. Most of them. They ran and played their collective games and forgot about Nancy writhing under the restraints and degradation of disease. Not being there to be seen or heard, she slipped slowly into things distant and sad. Wasn't it awful about poor Nancy and her terrible father, they said if they remembered. The turmoil, the pain, the tenderness in the house near the mouth of the canyon were "just awfully sad."

But Mike and Dale remembered. Nancy was part of nearly all the twelve years of life they could remember. Their ranches formed a strip of green and patterned husbandry along the mountain base where they had been born. They had fished together up the canyon. They had gone to church and school together. They had unsaddled her horse when they had arrived at school and had saddled it afterwards. They had ridden on each side of her and talked or raced their horses.

Nancy had long honey-candy hair brushed and braided every morning and shining in the sun. It was curly, and short ends escaped the careful braids and formed little fuzzy curls around her forehead. On hot days, and after they had been playing at recess, the dampness tightened the curls and made the boys want to touch them. Mike sometimes did. And she would laugh and push his hand away and run to the school house faster than either of them. Her eyes were a little bluer than skimmed milk, and her skin was like the foam of milk, and she was the smartest girl in school.

They didn't forget because each night they rode home they could see her house set back against the hill in its little colony of trees. They would quit speaking as they came to the hilltop overlooking the Spengler place. And they would ride thus for several minutes. Then Mike would say, "I wonder how she is tonight?" Dale would half mutter something and peer into the distance. Then Mike would grip his saddle horn with his right hand and cry out, "Why doesn't someone do something?" Dale would swear, and repeat the question, "Yeah, why don't they?"

For a while they stopped in to see her every night. But her continued wasting away, and they helpless to do anything, confused and tormented them.

And then there was her father. He paralyzed their powers and gave guilt and shame to their inaction.

Finally Mike's and Dale's folks and several other people called on the Spenglers. "It isn't right, what you're doing, Mr. Spengler," they said.

"God gave us the child. If it is His will, He can take her away." Mr. Spengler turned from them as if listening, then added quietly, "His will be done."

"But, don't you see," said Mrs. Rooney. "God would not want Nancy to die if she could be saved by a doctor's help."

Mr. Spengler's eyes blazed. He almost rose from his chair. "Are you presuming to judge God?"

"Well, you see, it's this way—" began Mr. Rooney.

"I know the way it is," announced Mr. Spengler with controlled wrath. "You would presume to interfere with God and the destiny He has ordained."

"No one wants to interfere with God, Mr. Spengler. But if science has taught us anything—"

"Science. Science. Science!" chanted Mr. Spengler as if cursing.

"God gave us brains," continued Mr. Rooney, "God gave us brains, Mr. Spengler, to find out how to overcome disease and pain. Nancy has a right—"

"Do not speak her name from your blaspheming mouth."

They were held momentarily silent in the grip of his rage. His eyes flashed across each one. Mrs. Rooney tried again with gentleness. "Please let us get a doctor. Please . . .?"

He turned on her, but spoke to all. "You come here when I'm stricken with grief and try and make me break faith with my God. If He were not a patient God, He would strike you dead this minute. All of you." He had risen. His eyes were dark pockets in his skull. His skin was shrunken over the bones of his face. In the lamplight he resembled death itself. "You had better go," he ordered. His voice trembled and his pointing finger shook.

"We were trying to be neighborly," someone mumbled as they all shuffled to the door.

"It is no neighbor that fattens on another's grief," Mr. Spengler said, cutting all other talk dead. They left to the sound of Nancy calling her father to please come hold her and pray away the pain.

The next day Mike and Dale did not go to school. They rode up the canyon. There they tied their horses by the creek and walked to the hill above Nancy's house. Up through the gentle air of the indolent summer day came the whimpering and crying as Nancy fought her battle against death. From the quiet, sleepy little house came the eye-shut and teeth-clenched sound. The fluttering drone of the daily air transport was a distant and nerveless comment between the mountains. For the passengers, being solicitously shuttled across space, the tumult of pain was only blue shadow under the fruit and poplar trees, of consequence less than the newspapers held in limp fingers, announcing strife and death in many lands.

"She must be worse today," said Dale after they had sat listening to the sounds come up to them.

"Dear Saints," whispered Mike tensely and covered his ears. Dale sat, outwardly impassive, as if Nancy's pain were not also his.

"Why doesn't somebody do something," said Mike, tears of rage trembling in his eyes.

Dale dug in the hillside with his heel. "You heard what her Old Man said. 'God will provide'." His kicking loosed some little rocks which rivuletted into a bush making a leafy patter. He shut his eyes as if against the sound.

"Nancy can't stand much more," Mike said tightly. "Just listen to her. Just *listen!*"

"I been hearing her!" Dale opened his eyes and a hotness was in them greater than the day's light. "Hell's sake, don't you think I got ears?"

Mike pounded the dry gravel and looked down on the curling shingles of the old house. "Dear God, somebody ought to do something."

"Sure," said Dale.

Here in Nancy's house was the disrupted center of their peace and security. Here was the world's sorrow, and they humanity's response.

"They got to do something." Mike struck his fists into the ground again, unaware of the sharp pieces of rock he impounded in his flesh. "They've got to do something."

"Maybe you could suggest what?" challenged Dale.

Mike plugged dirty fists against his feverish eyes and began rocking himself on his haunches. Little broken noises came from his pale, trembling lips. The motion and the noises churned into the quiet and into Dale's nerves.

"Hellamighty, what can you do about it? Or anybody? Hellamighty, stop sniveling."

"Who's sniveling?" Mike shouted as he jumped up, his fists knotted. Wet was smeared in the dust and sand around his blue eyes.

The stillness tensed.

"Fighting won't help Nancy none," said Dale without looking up.

"God damn it!" Mike kicked at the dirt near Dale's thigh and started walking bitterly up through the shrubs and trees.

After a few minutes, Dale followed him. When he got to the horses which were indolently switching at flies, Mike was not there. The sun cut swaths through the cottonwood roof of shade. Flies, large grey-green ones, landed and probed for blood into the twitching hides of the two horses which were standing side by side and head to tail so that the switching tail of one helped discourage flies from the head of the other. Thus they joined their powers against their enemy.

Dale rubbed their heads and led them to the shadowed stream. They buried their noses in the clear water because the bridle bits made drinking difficult.

"Why the hell didn't you take the bits outa their mouths?" challenged Mike from a hidden rock under a ledge across the stream.

"Why the hell didn't you give them a drink?"

"Want to make something of it?" Mike stood up.

Dale didn't answer. When the horses were finished, he led them out of the stream. As he turned, a geyser of water sprayed over him from a thrown boulder. Quick as a released spring, Dale reached a rock from the bank and hurled it. It was answered by a howl of rage and Mike ordering him from behind the horses, if he wasn't "a yellow-bellied coward!"

"You started this," warned Dale. "And if you know what's good for you, you'll shut up."

"Coward. Coward."

"You better be quiet, Mike, before I come over there and mash your face in."

"You and who else?"

"Just me. Just me!"

"Yeah? You daren't even get from behind those horses."

"And you daren't come off that ledge."

"Oh, yeah?" said Mike as he stepped into the open. Dale stepped out also. They stood staring at each other. "Well, keep coming," jeered Dale. "And if you throw another rock, I'll take a club and beat your brains out."

"Listen to who's talking!" Mike ran down the opposite bank and jumped from rock to rock across the stream.

Dale ran to meet him.

They met with fists swinging.

They slugged and kneeled and cursed and rolled in the dust. They twisted fingers and kicked. They pounded each other with bloody fists and until each blow was a weary effort.

When their anger and frustration and sorrow had been purged they lay on the ground, dirty and bloody. Finally Mike turned on his face and began to sob. "Damnit, Dale. I didn't want to fight you."

"I didn't want to fight you neither," answered Dale through bleeding and swelling lips.

## *EARLE BIRNEY*

### *Gulf of Georgia*

*Come where the seal in a silver sway  
    like the wind through grass  
goes blowing balloons behind him.*

*Lie where the breakers are crashing like glass  
    on the varnished sand  
writing their garrulous arabic.*

*Dive from the shining fluted land  
    through the water's mesh  
to the crab's dark flower and the starfish.*

*Trail the laggard fins of your flesh  
    in the world's lost home  
and wash your mind of its landness.*

# ARTHUR GREGOR

## *Kol Nidre*

*Sounds the ram's-horn  
all throughout the synagogues,  
supposedly to bring in some-  
thing new, good, bad or whatever*

*as before*

*early trumpets at 18th century  
Tafelmusik, only that goblets,  
grapes and toothbrush, it is  
written somewhere, supposedly,  
this evening of repentance  
are postponed for 24 hours;*

*or as*

*when Hitler, who was careful  
about food, blew the ram's-horn,  
started innumerable fires  
to delight his tanned boys  
who all adored him,  
and his questionable ladies  
who adored him less;*

*all of which was seen and heard  
far across the mountains,  
across the low lands and  
across the southern beaches.*

\* \* \*

*I do not know the similarity  
between a lion and a fountain  
but on this night of fast  
a lion seems like a terrible,  
insatiable fountain,*

untamed as to the rules of food  
robbing abundantly, giving forth  
more abundantly, giving his will,  
roaring with all the moons upon him  
in the swanless valley where once  
we are lost we are lost to him

as the shipwrecked tourist or  
sailor is lost to the distant fountain  
to the raw laughter of the sea  
to a dangerous imagination.

Because to give to the inevitable  
to give to the ruler  
involves either the sacrament of  
duty or of gamble for the giver

and because to be given  
always involves the complacency  
of being given, the high ceremonial  
of smoke and urns, and  
always the prayers of either  
personal gain or duty to those  
who are given again

many have risen to podiums  
demanding to be given

and many may rise again  
(who can be certain) demanding,  
accusing, pointing a finger  
the finger of state, of profit,  
the finger of law assigning  
martyrdom, the grossly transgressed  
whom we remember whom we  
for the sake of the many dead  
and the many murdered  
remember,  
for whom we are asked to ask  
to be forgiven The Lord The Lord  
Is Mindful Of His Own

as was the case of grasshoppers  
said to have attacked the grain  
deposits of an ancient city,  
or the bleeding roses on the fore-  
heads of the beautiful sufferers,  
as per the many frescoes

or the case of the crucifixion,  
or the scenes of conquered princes  
or of rebels led with tigers  
through the crowded streets of Rome.

\* \* \*

So the two metallic lions uphold  
from prosceniums of synagogues  
with spirits of fountains, supposedly  
also, and with elegance of swans,  
which is a bit more factual,  
such laws as Moses brought to Israel  
encamped in valleys, feasting  
under the yellow fruit trees.

Is it to be bravo bravo Moses  
(who knows) he had, after all, both  
a fair chance of profiting a  
kingdom and his cinnamon, his honey,  
his Abyssinian with very good hips.

Nevertheless he swore and spat.

Sounds the ram's-horn,  
so that  
By sanction of the court on high,  
goes on the reformed rabbi,  
and of the courts on earth (in other  
words all the courts) it is now  
declared lawful to offer prayers

with all who have transgressed  
with all who have transgressed  
with all who have transgressed

## Tomorrow Everything Will Be Different

Evelyn sat on the edge of the unmade bed in her slip and watched the hotel room revolve around her on a cockeyed wheelbase.

"And that was the way it happened," Tommy said nervously chewing a toothpick, "So help me God, Evie, I couldn't of saved the dough of I'd of swallowed it."

"Okay," she said, "Okay. It was a good story. Now what do we do about the kid?"

Tommy walked around the bed with small, quick steps. "Well obviously we got to get rid of it," he said. "Obviously we are not in any position for you be to having a kid. Especially when I just get lifted of that hundred bucks."

Evelyn swung her legs back onto the bed and pulled the covers over her.

"You kill me," she said. "You simply kill me."

Tommy reached for her hand. "Look," he said, "I told you how it was with the dough. I am hurrying to get here in time so you can keep that appointment, when this guy comes out of an alley and sticks a rod in my spine."

"I heard you the first time," Evelyn said. "Some day you're going to tell the truth and the shock will kill me."

Tommy want to the window. "It's raining again."

"Yeah?"

"Want the window open?"

"No."

"How do you feel?"

Evelyn turned her head and looked at him.

"Okay," he said, "I just asked. I'm sorry about the dough."

Evelyn rolled over against the wall. "Why don't you beat it," she said. "Why don't you get out of here? You make me sick. You make me sick to my stomach."

He came to the foot of the bed. "I said I was sorry, Evie. I can't say anything except that I'm sorry. I almost had the dough doubled for you, honey. I almost . . ." He beat his fist on the brass footboard. "Listen," he said tensely, "We played for four hours. I never been in such a tricky game before. I made two hundred the first four hands. Two hundred. I laid everything down on a long shot. Then this guy I never seen before sat in on the game, and in two hands . . ."

"Get out."

He sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Look, Evie," he said, "Why don't we just go ahead and have the kid. I mean, maybe it won't be so bad. I could get a job, and after while maybe we'd have enough dough to buy us a house somewhere. I know a guy that's

got some angles. "Maybe," he said, in a great burst of discovery, "maybe we could even get married."

He touched her shoulder. "Having a kid might not be such a bad deal. I used to like kids."

Evelyn lay with her eyes closed. Behind her lids a pattern of colors spread and burst, spread and burst. She pressed her finger tips against her lids. The colors rotated and pulsed.

"What are you doing?" Tommy leaned on his elbow, looking at her "What do you want to do that for?"

She opened her eyes. The colors melted against the gloom of dirty wall paper in a great passion of warmth and light. The sensation passed.

"How much money have you got left?"

"Two bucks." He took a dollar bill and some change from his pocket. "Tomorrow first thing I'll go down to the Employment Service and pick up an odd job. They need men to clean out ditches on the county roads. When it rains bad like this the ditches get full of stuff. I heard some guys talking today. Two bucks is enough to carry us over until Thursday. I ought to make a dollar an hour, cleaning out ditches."

"You and John D. Rockefeller." Evelyn propped herself up on her elbows. From the narrow window at the foot of the bed she could see a piece of the harbor and the top of the Court House. A row of pigeons lined the edge of the roof. She saw them surge up and back. A gull hung briefly in the rain above them and slid away on an updraft from the street.

"Why don't we go out and get some dinner," Tommy said. "You haven't had nothing to eat all day. You must be starving to death. I understand you got to have lots to eat when you're like that. Milk and eggs. We'll get you a good doctor. Maybe if I can get a little dough together we can get the kid paid for in advance. No mortgage on our kid, you bet."

"What time is it?"

"Three-thirty."

She lay back against the single pillow. "I don't feel like getting up. Why don't you go out and get us something. Bring me a tomato sandwich and some milk."

Tommy caught up his hat, snapped the brim. "Sure," he said brightly, "a tomato sandwich. Milk. Anything else? Pie? Doughnuts? Gum?"

"Just what I said. A tomato sandwich. A bottle of milk."

He headed for the door. "Want I should turn on the light?"

"Just get the sandwich."

Evelyn waited until she heard him on the stairs. She pulled herself out of bed and dressed, washing her face and hands in the basin by the bureau, brushing her hair one hundred strokes, shining her high heeled pumps with the edge of a towel.

When she had finished she took a coin purse from inside her other pair of shoes. She counted ten ten-dollar bills in it and put the money in her coat pocket.

It was five blocks to the address the doctor had given her. She caught an uptown bus filled with business men and the four o'clock shopping crowd. A fat man in a gabardine raincoat gave her his seat. She looked at him wide-eyed and sat with her head bent, her ungloved hands turned upward in her

lap, while the fat man watched her from under his lids. When she got off the bus she smiled at him.

Along the late afternoon streets light poured, rain-spotted, from shop windows. For an instant the excitement of the city and the drama of her role mounted in her. She walked the half block to the building lazily, and the men who passed her in the rain looked and looked again. She moved through the foyer and into the elevator with her heels sharp against the stone floor, slow, easy, walking as if she passed through sunshine.

The elevator man stared at her with a secret smile.

"Eight," she said, shaking the rain off her shoulders.

"Eight. Ain't I seen you someplace before?"

"Maybe you have," she said. "Like where?"

Three men in business suits and wet rain coats got in. A dumpy woman in imitation leopard and saddle shoes followed, pulling behind her a small girl in dirty white rabbit skins.

Evelyn leaned against the cage wall, her hand around the money in her pocket. The exhilaration passed. She felt sick to her stomach.

The other four passengers got out ahead of her. At the eighth floor the operator pulled the door open, leering daintily.

"Could be the room you're looking for is right down the hall. Room 8812."

She walked past him into the antiseptic air. "You guess them every time, I'll bet," she said. "I'll bet you haven't missed one in years."

"What beats me," he said, "Is how the smart ones like you get caught."

"The smart ones don't," she said.

When she opened the 8812 door a bell jangled overhead. From someplace a middle-aged woman in a white uniform appeared with too much haste. She stood between Evelyn and three other doorways that opened off the outside entrance. One of the doors led to a large, windowed waiting room filled with women.

"Yes?" said the nurse.

"I'm Mrs. Thomas Harris," Evelyn said.

"You had an appointment with the doctor?"

"I called her on the phone."

"I remember now, dearie," said the nurse, "I talked to you." She dropped her voice. "It'll be a while."

She allowed Evelyn to walk past her into the waiting room. A man in overalls sitting close to a woman in an old, fur-collared tweed coat looked up at her and whispered something. A fat, middle-aged woman in run-over brown shoes and pink cotton bobby socks squatted self-consciously on a divan. Evelyn walked to the farthest corner. A woman with string-colored hair and placid eyes moved over to let her sit down.

From inside one of the offices somebody murmured. "It will hurt. You mustn't cry out."

In the waiting room the women regarded each other secretly and looked away.

Rain slanted against the windows. Down on the streets, cars, home-hurrying, shushed along wet pavements, and somewhere in the center workings of the building a radio blared suddenly.

Evelyn turned the pages of a house magazine. A great and pressing excitement churned inside her. What if she won't take me, said a Voice inside her head. If she won't, she won't. I won't think about it. Maybe I ought to think about it.

The nurse appeared rabb't-out-of-hat-wise from one of the doorways. "Mrs. Harris," she breathed.

That was fast, said the Voice in Evelyn's head. She must be spotted for the cash customers.

She walked past the nurse into a small, cluttered office. Through a door hastily closed from the other side she saw a woman on a sort of examination table and a sink filled with something.

The short, bosomed, white-haired woman at the desk looked at her distractedly, holding rubber-gloved hands straight before her. My God, Evelyn thought, somebody's grandmother.

"Mrs. Harris, doctor," the nurse said.

"Well," snapped the woman at the desk.

"I was referred to you by Doctor Philips," Evelyn lied.

"Who?"

"Doctor Philips."

"Don't know him." The woman picked up a pencil. "What did you say your name is?"

"Mrs. Harris," Evelyn said. "My husband and I are getting a divorce. I couldn't possibly undertake the responsibility of having a child now."

"What does that have to do with me?"

"Doctor Philips said you could . . . help me."

The woman at the desk turned on her fiercely. "I don't believe you," she said. "It's right and proper for women to have families. I don't know what you're talking about."

"The divorce already is filed," Evelyn said steadily. "I can't have a child now."

"Hogwash!" The doctor spread her rubber-gloved fingers.

Evelyn laid the money on the desk, straightening the bills.

The doctor stood up. "I'll tell you one thing. It'll have to be right now or not at all. If it's not too late." She picked up the money and folded it down into the front of herself. The nurse materialized from someplace.

"In here," she said, leading Evelyn across the entrance hall into the forbidden inner room and into one of a dozen cubicles. Inside the cubicle was a cot made up with sheets and blankets, and a chair.

"Take off everything but your slip," the nurse said. "I'll give you your hypo now."

Evelyn looked away. The smell of alcohol preceded the needle. It went in deep. She felt a sudden numbness.

"How long does it take?"

"Not so loud," said the nurse. "We give the shot half an hour to make you sleepy. We take you in to the doctor. You come back and go to bed for a couple of hours. You go home and go to bed immediately." The curtain came together behind her.

Evelyn hung her clothes across the back of the chair. She lay down, closing her eyes. A swelling dizziness crashed through her head. An inner darkness breathed around her.

This is going to hurt, said the Voice in her head. This is going to be it. The shot is all you get. Oh, you bright, clever kid. You smart, fine, know-it-all beauty. Oh, sister.

Shut up, Evelyn said.

Maybe you'll die from it, suggested the Voice. Every once in a while it leaks out in the paper about some woman's dying from it. Or maybe she won't go through with it, the Voice said. Maybe it's too late. Eight weeks is too late. Maybe the hundred bucks won't be enough.

A heaviness, a thickness, a feeling of crushing weight moved out of the swaying walls. She put her face deep into the pillow. Someplace from across the roaring sea she heard the nurse say, "It's time now."

\* \* \*

She walked slowly and with care into the elevator.

"Well, well," said the operator, "Imagine seeing you alive. How do you feel?"

Evelyn hung on to the door. "I feel great. Help me over to the wall."

"I don't know how many times I done this. I begin to feel like an Eagle Scout. Shut your eyes. You'll pass out going down if you don't shut your eyes."

"What makes you think I've got them open?"

"You got cab fare?"

"Do I look smart enough to have cab fare?"

"I don't know," he said. "I can't figure you out. You don't look dumb enough to be here in the first place."

"Let it go," she said. "Is there someplace I can get a cup of coffee around here?"

He pushed the doors open. "Skip the coffee. You ought to be home in bed. You a bleeder?"

"Hell," she said, "I sold all my blood a long time ago for the price of a month's rent."

"Joke," the man said. "Go home."

"Home," Evelyn said. "You're breaking my heart."

Outside the dark rain had stopped. Light from colored neons lay puddled on the wet streets. There was a chill in the air like the chill of early, lonely morning. Two sailors looking for a tavern walked against a signal, the collars of their pea-jackets up-turned. A prowler car whined by, its red light blinking.

With aching deliberation she walked the five blocks to the hotel. Time dangled on a broken string. A thousand light-years later she found the right door.

"Where you been?" the desk clerk snapped. "Tommy's been looking all over hell-and-gone for you."

Evelyn started up the stairs. "That's where I've been."

"I want that rent tomorrow," the clerk said.

The roaring started in her head. She stopped at the second floor landing until it passed.

In the dim, musty room Tommy was sitting on the edge of the bed. He jumped up, holding on to the brass knob at the foot.

"Where you been? I been looking all over town for you. I got your sandwich and when I got back you wasn't here. I thought sure you walked out on me."

Evelyn made it to the bed and lay down without taking off her coat.

"You look awful sick," Tommy said. "What's the matter with you?"

She stared up at the papered ceiling. "Just tired."

Tommy sat beside her.

"I been thinking while you was gone," he said "It's time I got a job. A real job. It's time we settled down. We got to think about the kid. Tomorrow I'll go out and get a steady job and we'll get out of this rat hole. Tomorrow I'll get a really good job. You wait and see. Everything is going to be different. If we're going to have a kid everything has got to be different."

He took her hand. "Baby, I just wanted you to know I'm going to stick by you."

"Okay, Evelyn said, "fine."

Tommy got up and walked to the window to pull down the shade.

"You look awful tired. Why don't you eat your sandwich and take a nap?"

"Sure," Evelyn said.

Tommy poured milk from a half-pint bottle into a glass and brought it to her.

"They didn't have no tomato sandwiches," he said. "I got deviled egg. Good for the kid. You got to have lots of milk and eggs now."

He laid the sandwich wrapped in waxed paper beside the milk on the nightstand.

"Evie."

"Yeah?"

"Evie, I want to tell you something before you go to sleep."

"Tell me now."

"I got into a little game with that two bucks while you was gone," he said. "We made back a hundred and fifty of what I lost this afternoon." He paused. "If you want, you can go ahead and see the doctor, like we planned. But I been hoping you wouldn't want to anymore." He laid the money beside her cheek on the pillow.

Evelyn put her hands over her eyes. Underneath her lids the colors came.

"Don't cry, Evie. This time we won. Don't cry."

"I'm not."

"I told you tomorrow things would be different. That game was the last one. Honest to God."

"Okay," she said wearily, "it was the last one."

He touched her hair. "Don't ever leave me, Evie." He pulled the blanket over her shoulders. "Get some rest now and eat when you can. I'll be back later." He turned out the light.

Lying in the swaying, swelling, color-shot dark, Evelyn heard him take the money from the pillow, close the door and go down the stairs to the lobby.

# LIONEL MONTEITH

## *The Cavalier Poets*

*Sometimes they walk slowly—  
yes, they walk slowly,  
like automatons, into the  
gaping grave.*

*And always it is sad  
that such gay cavaliers  
should die young—  
imagining the ways of hell  
are sequestered,  
and each attempting to be  
the one,  
the only one,  
the outstanding rake.*

*Yet when they wake  
in a strange bed  
and the erotic image  
is again reality, they are dead;  
having silenced the  
whispering voices, the world  
more vibrant than flesh,  
they are consumed in their own desire.*

*But still they conspire by candle-light  
to cheat the soil  
in which their roots grow;  
they are lost to the world  
of light  
and the ultimate pleasure—  
negating the brief hour,  
they die twice.*

# *R. A. D. FORD*

## *Looking Towards Astrakhan*

*Mirrored in distance, and the lean,  
Grey Volga steppe spread out  
With dirty snow to intercept  
The eye and dull the mind, the dream*

*Of Astrakhan defeats the space  
Of Russia, put up like barbed wire  
In lesser lands, and the Caspian, dipped  
Down towards the ancient face*

*Of Persia, shimmering in the cold air  
Where the ponies of Batu the Terrible  
Drank and his fierce warriors  
Slept on the carnage of Vladimir.*

*They shouted in the streets of the city: "regret  
Is the fruit of pity" and left  
Their stain on the Russian soil.  
Out of the endless East the gift*

*Of war they brought; and into the East  
Our eyes, blinded in the glare  
Of mystery no factory can hide,  
Strain past Astrakhan and the lure*

*Of golden domes to the illimitable  
Problem of the centre of the world.  
No voyager beyond can ever tell  
Its history, repeat the secret word*

*The vortex of the globe has held,  
The scourge of Europe, and the bell  
Tolling for the West, no man relate  
What force released those arms of hate.*

# ELGIN WILLIAMS

## The Nerve Of Sidney Hook

Mr. Sidney Hook some time ago convinced all who still needed convincing that the present epoch is marked by a "failure of nerve." He analyzed at length and found a most apt phrase for a phenomenon so striking that all intellectuals had noticed it and come away perturbed, if not themselves vaguely nervous. This phenomenon was, and is, what appears to be a growing lack of confidence in the scientific method, a "revolt against reason," a growing search for absolutes to replace the self-reliance which the present generation had come to think should be employed to solve its problems.

This "failure of nerve" was familiar to most of us in a direct and personal way even before the appearance of Mr. Hook's article. As they say of Europe that there is no person who does not number a relative or close friend among the casualties of war, so in America there are few intellectuals who have not had a friend or a professor or a favorite critic turn to the reading of one or another mystic or join one or another "nature colony."

The actions of these friends—also perhaps to be numbered among the casualties of war—are extremely unsettling. It is no wonder, therefore, that even those who continue about their business (one almost says those who have "kept the faith," such is the temper of the times) are to some extent caught in the drift. Thus it is that the centers of pragmatism occupy themselves with conferences on the scientific "spirit" and the democratic "faith," and issue a symposium on *Naturalism and the Human Spirit*. Even the stalwart Mr. Hook seems not to have the opposite of the failure of nerve, what David Riesman calls the nerve of failure, and decides that he must choose as absolute either the United States or the Soviet Union, evil though they both are. ". . . Among the fossils he beheld the Rock, somewhat decayed, perhaps, and less awful than it had been, but solid enough for him."

Such are the signs of the time, and one would be foolish to under-rate their importance. Nevertheless it is possible that the retreat from reason is not quite so extensive as Mr. Hook and others have made it out to be—even if we include Mr. Hook himself in the retreat. For if one disregards labels and examines closely the content of much of the literature of the failure of nerve one becomes increasingly suspicious that what W. Y. Tindall calls the "substitute religions" it embraces are not entirely religious after all. If there is a revolt against science in progress many of the rebels conceive science as the atomic bomb and are fighting in the name of skepticism. Although others pride themselves on their anti-rationality it turns out that they really mean anti-rationalization—which isn't so unscientific. (After all, as the *New Yorker* recently remarked, it is the Sensible People who have got the world in the shape it's in.) Again, the dictates of Nature which others of the rebels are opposing to those of Society look suspiciously like those of modern investigators in the psychological and biological disciplines.

That so much of the literature of the "escapists" is thus scientific in upshot if not in guise—their own polemics to the contrary notwithstanding—

suggests that the failure of nerve has been sold short, in part at least. In the first place, as Philip Reiff has pointed out, the intellectual standing of many of the "anti-scientific" reactionaries who are seducing the children of the scientific age is extraordinarily high. This has not always been true of previous "failures of nerve," although some of these have also been too easily dismissed. Anyone who has been puzzled enough over the elder Henry James' attraction to Swedenborg, for instance, to go to the master himself will remain puzzled, for there is really nothing there. The "angelic philosophy" which so interested not only Henry James Sr. but even the notoriously practical Emerson was not only not true but a very old rehash indeed.

But the case of the Swedenborg vogue is not the case, as we are now beginning to realize, of the vogue of Ruskin and Morris, for instance, and we should not be misled by their choice of words. We now know that when they attacked science and industrialism they meant "scientific management" and capitalism; moreover their alternative society was not so simply "reactionary" as some "scientific" people think. Such misinterpretation has occurred in many other cases, where critics careless in the use of language have been themselves carelessly classified with the "angelic philosophers."

Despite the frequent "revivals" which this hurried dismissal of "reactionaries" entails the brasher among the new devotees of science continue to describe as mystical *en toto* anyone who so much as spells God with a capital G. The reason for this, pointed out by Mr. Reiff, is probably over-compensation. "Liberals are always troubled when they find that a political reactionary is a man of vision whose intellectual or artistic work demands respect." It is because they are troubled that liberals "dismiss" such reactionaries—without making any distinction between their politics and their intellectual and artistic work—as "mere" failures of nerve.

We must agree with Mr. Hook that such cavalier treatment takes a good deal of nerve. But by such actions the devotees of the scientific method not only cripple their understanding but violate one of their own fundamental working principles: that one pays attention to the content instead of the source of ideas. Out of the mouths of babes and fools come words of wisdom, while the great physicists Jeans, Eddington and Planck—not to mention Newton—have enriched the world's store of political and religious nonsense. The suicidal tendency to forget this homely truth is of a piece with modern "liberalism" which tries to prevent a great soprano from giving concerts because she is a Quisling—forgetting that for all of us the best possible punishment which could be exacted of this "war criminal" would be a host of concerts.

The point is, one must distinguish between good and bad ideas or achievements, instead of between good and bad individuals. This point is conveniently summed up by reference to the case of T. S. Eliot. One would have to be inflicted with "sinful pride" mortally indeed to "dismiss" the great poet and essayist because he has taken refuge in another Rock about as decayed as Mr. Hook's—the Anglican church. Not only should we be very chary of "dismissing" Eliot's critique of contemporary civilization, whatever we think of his reactionary solution. Even this solution should be examined very carefully and every care taken to guard against being confused by words. I am not quite sure, for instance, that the Utopia outlined in *The Rock* is so entirely medieval as it is made out to be. It bears (if one looks at what is said

and not at the religious tone) some resemblance to a democracy cooperatively engaged in creative activity, something like the “industrial republic” of Thorstein Veblen—who was hardly a mystic! A much more healthy reaction to T. S. Eliot than a picket line would be to say: If such a sensitive poet thinks it would be a good thing for us all to get together to build a (new) universal church, there might be something to it. At least one would have unsurpassed company!

There is good company too in the back-to-nature colonies, nor do social scientists and architects frown on such decentralization so much as the anti-scientific Lawrentians seem to think.

At the same time it is important to remember that the more flagrant revolts against reason—an earlier generation would have called them “excesses”—rather than representing the mature thought of creative thinkers such as Eliot have arisen at the hands of over-zealous followers and disciples. There are, for instance, devotees of Rilke who think his value is religious—just as the Athenians misconceived the Parthenon. We now know, as C. E. Ayres has pointed out, that the Parthenon is an architectural achievement, just as we should know that Rilke’s achievement is poetic and just as Communists should give Gropper’s art a little attention instead of valuing his social views, which are strictly second-hand and second-rate. Whether disciples can make such distinctions or not, it is certainly true that most intellectuals can, and this is another reason for caution in crying “failure of nerve!” It is at least an open question, for instance, whether people are buying Waugh’s novels for the Catholicism or for the soirees of the Bright Young People; in any case the purchase of a package of stock which contains both Captain Ryder and Agatha Runcible is still a good investment. The same goes for Aldous Huxley: the Vedanta is there but so is a fascinating fund of biological information—derived, no doubt, from Huxley’s scientific relatives!

The misinterpretations of disciples and followers should be expected anyway. After all, radicals are rare by definition and it is natural that their worst aspects should be chosen for emulation by most people, especially when the present generation (both writers and readers) have been brought up in a religious turn of mind, still desirous of certainty even though they now know they shouldn’t be. It was true of the pre-war period as of the nineteenth century that, as Tindall puts it, “Science had not expelled religion but, driving it beneath the surface where it fretted for a time like a Freudian repression, had forced it to seek eccentric outlets and various disguises.” Science has still not expelled the old tradition, and the substitute outlets and disguises continue to flourish.

It is this desire for “substitute religions” which explains the vogue of Kafka as a “mystic” and that of Existentialism as a new religion. As a matter of fact Kafka’s writings, as Paul Goodman has pointed out, are valuable as literal descriptions of reality, not for any presumed religious moral or preaching. And the importance of Existentialism, excepting those “origins” which have lately been sedulously dredged from the murk of German metaphysics, is closely akin to that of Kafka, especially as a literary technique, as the existentialists’ acknowledged indebtedness to Hemingway and Faulkner should remind us.

If one is to cry "failure of nerve," therefore, one must carefully distinguish between leaders and disciples. Of course all this does not deny that many a quaint scrap of antique lore is to be found among the works of the most distinguished "reactionary" artists and critics—even though most of these are used for esthetic and not religious purposes. Indeed, there are enough such to keep whole companies of enthusiasts and disciples busy ferreting them out and elaborating their Truths.\* But the widespread influence of Eliot and Kafka and Rilke and the rest should not be laid to their divagations on the divine. After all, only a few of their readers are out-and-out "followers." If Eliot applied the principles laid down in "The Hippopotamus" only to alien creeds, it is not necessary that the majority of readers stop there, any more than that students of Newton's *Principia* be taken in by the great scientist's treatise on the topography of Hell. Even the enormous influence of a reactionary in the social sciences, such as Friedrich Hayek, is not necessarily a calamity. It may well be that people will remember Hayek's twin theses that under communism the Party is unamendable just as is Private Property under free enterprise (although why they needed reminding, when both the communists and the free enterprisers have been saying the same thing for years, it would be hard to say) without thereby casting their lot irrevocably with the latter.

Finally, on two specific points the leaders of the failure of nerve have made gross mistakes and correspondingly have been grossly misunderstood.

One of these mistakes has to do with the nature of skepticism. Somehow people have got the idea that skepticism is alien to the scientific method, and as skeptics many of the leaders of the failure of nerve have considered themselves to be anti-scientific. Thus Kafka is called by Thomas Mann a "religious skeptic"—whatever that might mean. It is true that Kafka does out-skeptic the skeptics—especially as regards the political pseudo-scientists and bureaucrats whose portraits he has drawn so damningly—but it is hard to identify this ridicule of authority with religion, which has always been thought to frown on it. Again one of the focal points of skepticism and, so it thinks, of the failure of nerve has been the magazine *Politics*. One reads that the "new approach" so widely called for today must be a religious one, meaning by that, Dwight Macdonald assures us, simply that it must be "non-scientific." But then one goes on to find out that the reason such a change must be made is that the "non-scientific" approach "is more valid . . . in both intellectual and ethical terms than the . . . approach based on scientific method."

Nietzsche said that he was the most devout of all those who believe not in God; surely many of the modern thinkers whose nerve is said to have failed are the most skeptical of all those who believe not in science. Both reactions are of course the reactions of blood-brothers, involving the heat of family quarrels. Try as hard as they may the great majority of the present generation will be unable to escape entirely the habits of rationality in which they have been trained, even as those of Nietzsche's period could not break away from supernaturalism.

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\*A student of D. H. Lawrence once told me in all seriousness that Tindall's book on Lawrence was "sacrilegious." And I have had the good fortune to fall in with a Reichian who, having read of the identity of the *psyche* and the *soma*, proceeded to demonstrate that all bodily ailments are functional in character, thereby rendering physicians, medicines, vaccination, etc., superfluous to the free personality. What if a rock falls on a free personality? he was asked. "Accidents happen only to sadists," he said.

One escape that, however, has already been accomplished must be understood if we are to evaluate correctly such polemics as that of Mr. Sidney Hook. It too has been conceived to be an escape from science, but again a misinterpretation is involved.

This is the current rejection of the idea of inevitable progress. It is of course quite true that this idea is fallacious, but it is too bad that the "failure of nerve" has identified it with science. The critics of the belief in inevitable progress have made the mistake of confusing labels with realities: they think that philosophers like Herbert Spencer are scientists, because they said so—just as many people think those in the failure of nerve are anti-scientific because they say so. But in renouncing the Spencerian glorification of modern "civilization" Dwight Macdonald and the rest are rejecting pseudo-science not science, Social Darwinism not Darwinism. If memory serves, vision of that inevitable progression of the better and better which so animated the nineteenth century (and much of the twentieth) saw its culmination not in a scientific utopia but a far-off Divine event.

To lay the doctrine of progress at the door of science is natural, however, since it is the priests of the status quo who today claim themselves to be the incarnations of science—just as not long ago they claimed to hold the secret of eternal progress. It is all to the good, therefore, that this kind of failure of nerve and opposition to "reason" is becoming more widespread every day. So long as atomic bombs, "efficient" death camps and universal military training are thought to be expressions of the scientific spirit (instead, as they are in fact, expressions of the opposite) what is needed in the world is a "revolt against science," and who will quibble over words?

## *CAROL HALL*

### *Dreams of Fair Women*

*Mary wept a wrong young dream,  
Danae tricked a tower of shame  
And bought a phantom when she blushed,*

*Europa knew her night flesh melt  
Scheming at dawn that beast's hair brushed  
Her side, and narrow Leda knelt*

*In cold want of her caught blood spilt  
In sacrifice, or tried her tame  
Hair laced with feathers white as flame.*

## This Moment

*Prologue:*

“Come near, ye nations, to hear;  
And hearken, ye people . . .”

*(Read matter-of-factly)*

Until a moment ago this was a normal day—  
Men lived their usual pantomime,  
With Age-old actions  
Striving to create a perfect equation; yet, held in the sway  
Of impersonal Illogic, their design  
Came out in fractions . . .  
This confusion has instantly passed away . . .

An eerie voice just banished personal will and individual choice,  
Radar-atomically announcing the Deluge.  
With sincerity beyond suspicion of joke or subterfuge  
The Voice hung seemingly in air, suspended everywhere overhead:

“This is Professor Jones, of Yale—I speak  
Also for my colleagues, Pierce and Spencer—who for a week  
Have been absent from the Atomic Research laboratory.  
Here’s the story, in brief;  
Please believe us . . . it’s NOT beyond belief!  
We thought at first—with our frightening new power  
To quietly ascertain the hour  
And plunge Earth spinning into space—  
Exploding chain-like, until no trace  
Of it or man remained.  
This, I successfully explained  
To Pierce and Spencer, was too kind.  
Man deserves the punishment of knowing his death-warrant signed . . .  
This is that notice.  
And again—don’t allow us  
To frighten you unduly—You have a few minutes yet . . .  
Minutes in which to set  
Your mortal matters right . . .  
Is there anything you wish to forget,  
Tonight?”

## ACT I

(*Quick, news-flash voice; brisk, breezy.*)

(Radios, tuned in on earth, blared forth in a scared last-minute report):

“Hello World. This is Dana, with what might well be the *last*, the most up-to-date news flash of all Eternity! . . . Hold on!”

“Mr. Dana? . . . Dana, we got Richter, the head of that god-damned lab. Are you on the air?”

“Yes, Chuck . . . go ahead . . . tell it from your end.”

“Dana, the damn thing seems true. She’s set to blow—so far as I can tell.”

“Put on Richter, Chuck. Hurry.”

“Here he is. Richter?”

“Richter speaking.”

“This is Dana. Richter, is it true Spencer and Pierce are missing, have been missing for a week?”

(*Resigned*)

“Yes—and they have with them . . . well, you heard?”

“Hell yes, man—what of it? Speak up—you’re on the air!”

(*Resigned*)

“Dana, if they are serious . . . if they intend to go through with it, they can.”

(*Pause*)

Silence. Listeners wait, caught rigid in the middle of movement.

(*Pause*)

(*Unbelief, ennui*)

“Ladies and gentlemen—that was Richter, of the American Atomic Research Lab. And this is Dana, signing off! I’ll try to make it home, Marge. Wait for me!”

The eerie voice of Jones breaks in: “See you in hell, Dana!”

## ACT II

(*Straight narration*)

On an isolated plateau above the Colorado river three men—Spencer, Pierce and Jones of Yale, are grouped around a table inside a small tent. On the table is a small black ball, from it, three silver wires run to earphones at which the three men listen. Spencer and Pierce are nervous. Jones, in contrast, smiles with deep satisfaction. Voices, like spirit voices, come to their ears. Occasionally Jones turns a switch attached to the ball and speaks, then switches it back to listen.

For two minutes the voices they hear are incredulous but normal. Then, presaging the unity of the damned, a few spokesmen—poets and philosophers by last compulsion, give vent to oracular statements and ridiculous pleas.

(*Jubilant, scornful.*)

Jones turns to Spencer and Pierce: “They’re cracking. They realize their time runs dry . . .”

(*Frightened*)

“Christ, Jones—this, it’s something out of our hands. We have no right!!”

(*Menacing*)

“Shut up—I hold here the ‘starter.’ Another word and I’ll squeeze it, and metamorphose earth and everything on it into original atoms! . . . Listen!”

(*Straight narration*)

Earth voices mingle in chaos. Discordant elements separate themselves out and a few attitudes become unanimous. Already there appears to be a fission, a separation, a final disjoining of intelligences. Various choruses speak, with incredible swiftness that tells they know time is short:

THE ABSTRACT POET:

(*Slow, thoughtful*)

*This is the interim pause, the plateau of atomic science;  
The reforming of national lines and laws into a world alliance.  
This is the curve-second's stillness; explosive Gravity in disguise;  
Universals that fill us with foreboding sighs.  
This, the earth we knew and now know not.  
Its infancy through, the fable forgot.  
We wait—who lately celebrated the perfect peace,  
For the explosion . . . Earth, accelerated, soon to cease.*

*In this, the interim pause, we show no reliance  
On Eternal Cause, but a vague defiance,  
Unworded, motivated not by Him who soon will be forgot,  
Nor by our insecurity.  
At last . . . at least our lot will splendid be,  
And brief.  
No time for fond philosophy, nor poetry,  
Nor grief.”*

THE POET IRONIC:

(*Quicker*)

*“A few minutes to live . . . that, man,  
Your newly given span.  
And then? The earth (a trillion years  
Before her geologic time)  
Will end your belief, as I, this rhyme!”*

THE POET SENSUAL:

(*Defiant*)

*“Despite the talk of Earthly suicide  
(In a mad atomic ride),  
Despite things to be, the shape  
Of instantaneous hells to come,  
No doubt the grape  
Has taste for some . . .  
It has, I know, for me!”*

PREACHER POET:

(*Intone—slightly nasal*)

*“And so—(I was to say ‘tomorrow’!)—  
But now, when moments count as centuries,  
And a day, that span inconceivable,  
I’d best use language more conceivable!  
And so now, this moment, best prepare yourself for the Maker . . .”*

POET IRONIC interrupts:

*"Atomic cremation, the great Undertaker,  
Has planned the judgment day.  
'Judgment,' did I say?  
Forgive me, there'll be none. Judgments are men,  
There'll be none around who can  
Judge, by tomorrow.  
By then, this universe (of sorrow)  
Will have disappeared.  
I advise you, dear listener—now aware of your fate,  
To investigate . . . before it's too l---"*

THE COMMON POET:

(Wearily)

*"A minion among million minions am I  
Who pursue this final investigation,  
Who, before they die,  
Would like one last crack at that elusive "Why?"  
Who would seek, by logical experimentation,  
The ground of "Wherefore," the Dominion of Doubt—"*

POET IRONIC:

(Flippant)

*"—As slippery smooth as an eel or a trout!—  
But we must hurry—in truth, the sands run out  
Of the looking glass.  
While you stand there idly scratching your ass  
There's a last word, a last hypothesis to fling  
Net-like into speculative seas . . . what will it bring?  
Laughter, hate, derision?  
And all sorts of circums:  
-scribe, -vent, -stance and -cise?  
The greater vision?  
The lancet and dum-dum slice.  
Deep shades that entice  
And choke?  
Life, living are no joke.  
Only Death is that, for sure—and maybe Literature."*

PHILOLOGICAL POET:

(Expressionless)

*"I'm glad you spoke—  
Though Literature, despite what you say, is no joke.  
I wish I could quibble with your rhythm and rhyme  
But they say it is time.  
So be it. 'The time has come,' the Atom said,  
'To talk, as we join hands,  
Of chewing gum and rubber bands,  
Of woman's breast . . . and Dead . . .'"*

POET IRONIC:

(*Hurried, half laughing*)

“No, no—your listeners will interrupt,—  
You shouldn’t be so damned abrupt.  
Now, where were you?  
Yes, yes, go on from breast . . .  
They’ll give you time to say the rest!”

PHILOLOGICAL POET continues:

(*Begins to warm a bit*)

“The atom was in embryo. I’ll stretch the rest out past the womb  
Until it grows to fill this room!”

IRONIC POET:

(*Admonitory*)

“No flippancy, my lad—be strictly scientific.”

PHILOLOGICAL POET:

“Oh well, such my doom.

To begin with:

in the beginning was: womb (woom), noun,  
(ME, wombe, wambe, fr. A. S. wamb, womb;  
Akin to D. wam, belly.  
OS and OHG. wamba, G. wamme, wampe, ON. vomb,  
Sw. vamb, Dan. vom, Goth. wamba.  
Cf WAMMUS).

1. Obs. The belly; specif.:

- a. The abdomen,
- b. The stomach,
- c. The bowels,
- d. The hide from the belly,
- e. A belly-shaped part of anything.

2. The uterus. ‘Transgressors from the womb.’

—Cowper.

3. Any cavity like a womb in containing and enveloping.

4. The place where anything is generated or produced.

‘The womb of ecrth the genial seed receives.’

—Dryden.”

JONES:

(*Sternly*)

“Insert some rhetoric with your discussion  
Or there’ll be an immediate repercussion!”

POETIC IRONIC:

“Rhetoric? Unless I miss my guess  
You want more female, less (scientific) dress!  
Should I say on?”

JONES:

“Continue . . . under truce and advisement,  
And subject to instant withdrawal  
If our interest begins to lag . . .”

POET IRONIC:

“(How continue? How stall? . . .  
I could save the world with a good gag!)  
First there was womb (see 3 above),  
A vacancy to be filled by love . . .  
(I like that line, it has a neat interior design) . . .  
Oh Fates, let Her enchantment to my verse,  
Let my lines be Sapphic  
And pornographic,  
To rouse the sexless scientists, who then might list,  
And spare the world atomic death.  
Give springtime to my words,  
Rejuvenation through the hypnotics of scance  
And prosodic circumstance.  
Let Age unshell itself, and dance . . .

(Semi-chant)

Remove the hex with the magic of sex  
And save, oh save the world.”

THE POET SENSUAL:

“Wait! Before you pull the atomic chain  
To flush the earth away . . .  
Have you never lain in a bed of hay, new-mowen,  
With a woman, to have, to own?  
Nor seen the tourist sights  
From Israel’s mountain?”

POET IRONIC:

(Mockingly)

“Nor tasted the ‘ten delights’ at Benson’s fountain?”

POET SENSUAL:

“Wait! The world still has a sweet, intoxicating taste  
That bids you stay your impatient haste  
To do away with it and us.”

POET CONTEMPLATIVE:

(Slower)

“I know a stream (you knew it too),  
Revolving liquid sweet through  
Far off dream.  
(The things you wished, the streams you fished,  
The fount, from which you rose, at dawn,  
And strolled along a greener lawn  
Beside a more golden sea.)

(Quickens, Intensifies)

Is nothing worth, that all should be  
Riven;  
Given to the Universal doubt, uncertainty: Anonometry?  
Think twice, oh sages, oh wisest of wise;  
Look closely at the world once more, through eyes  
That knowingly look their last.  
Is there nothing here worth a future?  
Is all to be Past?

JONES breaks in, chuckling:

(Starts briskly, slowing as Jones swept to joyful past)

"You bore the hell out of us, if you must know—

Sorry, old chaps, it's about time to go.

We've heard your story somewhere, someplace before

Along a vastly different, more refreshing shore,

Uneroded by periodic war.

We too, once sang your song

In a world that knew no wrong—

(A world gloriously young and pink ...)

Those days we didn't have to think,

Those days we found no need for drink—

But now?

(Quickens, intensifies)

Ferment the very sea with gold grain and gold grape;

With rice and wheat and wild fruit,

And play us, as we drink, on a magic magic lute

That banishes age and impotence,

And lends suspense

To ecstasy ..."

POET IRONIC:

"Ah now! You too, Jones?

I detect in your tones

A sentimentality at variance with your pose!

Your personality has split—who knows,

You may change your mind and suddenly find

Life worth the living ache.

A sad mistake,

To pit my hopes on human frailty.

Buck up, old man, don't fail me!"

JONES:

(Disgusted, tired, yet serious)

"Even then, I say, we'd not feel free

To absolve mankind and the world, ourselves, and you

From what the world has just been through.

Too late.

Too late for sensual appetite to set things right;

Too late for us to contemplate the passion of the grape,

And rape.

It took aeons for consciousness to come

Past the intoxicated state of Rum

To this, our Morning After.

Is not the spectacle worth laughter?

Tears?

Think! How many wasted years

Spent finding disillusion.

*How long for man to come to the adult conclusion  
That living is hell . . . and man just as well off dead.  
A few (to be true)  
Knew this long ago . . . but the means were just found  
By which all woes could be drowned  
Everlastingly.  
Now, consciousness has (in Us) reached the final stage,  
And the world has (in its Old Age)  
Supplied the means, Atomic.  
Soon all will be as it was Before  
Mind's first ripple washed the Shore  
Of Sense.  
Soon . . . at last! . . . will end suspense,  
And then?*

MYSTIC POET:

*"And then, limitless expanding never-ending trance  
Beyond Time, Space, Distance;  
No joy, sorrow, fright, longing or fear  
In the Nada, Nadir.  
We'll spin dizzily until we see the Capital S-P-A-C-E . . .  
We'll rush out boldly to meet It face to face  
In the void . . ."*

POET IRONIC:

(Bitterly)

*"(Burning like celluloid—  
Or a string, hung high on a whorehouse ceiling,  
Concealing  
Universal stink!)"*

MYSTIC POET:

*"The Ecstasy! Just think!"*

COMMON POET:

(Befuddled)

*"Think? I had a private scheme or two . . .  
Something important to do . . .  
(See the string on my finger?)  
Damn, why can't we linger  
Until things are complete?"*

JONES:

(In more solemn, judicial tone)

*"Lingering would be sign of ultimate defeat—  
We've waited now  
Just to tell you why, and how;  
So you can settle things with God . . . and your wife . . .  
Before entering into the negation of strife  
And unwilling willing.  
Beyond reach of life, and killing."*

POET MILITANT:

*"This thing you are about to do  
May be, it is true,  
A solution . . ."*

POET IRONIC:

*"Easier by far than a moral or political revolution!  
Why, if Shelley or Marx had known the secret of Atomic power  
They might have chosen, long ago, the fated hour,  
And all since would not have had to be!"*

POET MILITANT:

*"But the things of enduring worth? The poems man made,  
The tyrant laws that were NOT obeyed,  
The songs, the statues, plays?"*

POET IRONIC:

*"All temporal—a momentary craze,  
A hobby to keep sane . . .  
Without which, true enough, man would uproot mandrake and  
eat wolf-bane.  
But consider: how much simpler to have never had life;  
And having life, how much easier if we'd never thought,  
Become conscious.  
Not only you . . . all of us.  
Then we'd not have been taught  
Those falsehoods that made living seem worthwhile:  
The fables by which man tried to beguile  
His accident.  
We'd have existed comfortably amidst survival hell,  
Not knowing, as the beast."*

MILITANT AND IRONIC POETS, in chorus:

*"Well, at least  
We have at hand a militant deliverance—  
A means of thwarting the urge and ache  
All men would just as soon forsake . . ."*

POET SENSUAL:

(Reverently)

*"A lover has loosed the magic girdle from Her loins,  
Yet before he purloins  
The sunken gold  
Both die, the whispered richness untold.  
Listen, the lover speaks:*

(Business-like; matter of factly)

*'All I ask is one more night—  
With skill, with tenderness and luck I might  
Make that blonde across the hall—  
You speak of Ultimates, the All:  
Well, this, for me, is it.*

*She has the World's Desire wrapped up in either . . .  
I love that gal . . . and that's no . . .  
Perhaps I'm short on pretty speeches  
But what I FEEL . . . that reaches  
Heights you'll never know,  
Beyond which flesh can never go.  
And if tonight I'm satisfied . . .  
I can face tomorrow's earth-suicide  
Calmly.  
You can then press the button, embalm me . . .”*

POET IRONIC:

*“. . . In instant incense of earth burning;  
Signalling the end, the Returning!”*

POET SENSUAL:

*“Wait, the woman speaks:  
'Ya know this gives ME the creeps!  
Even though it sounds like a bunch of phoney crap.  
Believing it, I'd feel like a virginal sap!  
But say, for fun, it's really so—  
What then?  
I'm more than ready to pack up and go  
Away from men.  
I'd willingly burn (inside and out)  
Just to hear some of the bastards shout  
In agony and fear.  
By God, I really would.*

*(Provoked, tired)*

*And I want it clearly understood  
That I'm not in my stall to that simp across the hall,  
You hear?  
I don't give a good god damn any more.  
O.K., laugh, and say: Said like a whore.  
Just remember: I'll say it again if I said it before!”*

PREACHER POET:

*(Intoned)*

*“Amen, amen.  
Scientists think they ordained what so soon is to come;  
It was foretold years ago—the millenium!  
Look you to heaven!*

*(Dubious, questioning)*

*The thought of death SHOULD fill you  
With glowing ecstasy and contentment.  
You know not—need feel no resentment  
Because of things terrestrial,  
Bestial . . .”*

## POET CONTEMPLATIVE:

(Slow, matter of factly)

*"It's midnight—frogs below me in the marsh-meadow keep  
Singing their ancient song  
And yet, the World has not long  
To listen, nor to sleep.  
Three wise men, benevolent as sage  
Are even now preparing to assuage  
Its never-ending thirst.  
Each shall be last to die, and first;  
Atomically.  
The black, the white—good, bad, better, worst.  
There'll be no wrong, no imprisoned, no free:  
No ETHICALLY!*

(Quickens a bit)

*This is to be quick denial, the end of volition, suffering, inequality!  
The suppression of desire and inhibition,  
Death of slut, prostitute and bride;  
Butcher, baker, pimp and rake.*

(Slow crescendo)

**THE RECTIFICATION AND THE MISTAKE  
INDISSOLUBLE.**

*This will end the painful, idle Dream  
And the Vision  
By a last shrill Scream of insane Derision.*

(Slow)

**THE IMMORTAL CALCULUS NONE DARE DERIDE,  
THE COMPLETE, THE OVERWHELMING RACE-SUICIDE."**

## POET IRONIC:

(Quietly, gently)

*"Listen, as you wait the fated hour,  
To the consoling words of Schopenhauer;  
Or, if you list,  
Some other Buddhist!"*

Jones' voice once again breaks in, hovering menacingly over the entire world:

*"The time draws near . . . the time is nigh . . .  
In seconds now, the earth, the sea,  
Birds, beast, fish, plants . . . you and I  
Will cease to be.  
We'll flame and die . . .  
And (how does the Catechism explain the schism?)  
Ah yes—burned, we will revivify!  
Steady!  
Spencer? Pierce? The world? . . . Ready?  
Synchronize . . . your . . . heart . . . beat—  
NOW . . . BEGINS . . . THE GREAT DELETE . . ."*

### ACT III

*"We have made a covenant with death;  
With hell we are at agreement . . ."*

There is a second of frantic noise. A sound of gigantic struggle hangs over the world. Then there is a moment of silence. On earth, men look expectantly at one another. Earth seems to tremble. (Didn't she, just then?)

Yes! At first gently, at first reluctantly, then suddenly with increased, spasmodic throes; gigantic labor pains. Dishes and vases totter and crack, lamps overturn, lights go off. Frame buildings crash, then brick and cement (and ice igloos, colored tents, sod houses, thatch huts—the whole shebang shakes loose).

*The mountains trembled  
And the hills moved lightly.  
The mountains skipped like rams  
And the hills like little lambs . . .  
There is a crying for wine in the streets.*

A weird mad singing wind joins the quaking roar. Rivers stop, pile and overflow, some reverse direction. Oceans trough and crest, the utter depthless depths lay bare in spots. Huge rips and cracks of earth emit smoke and flame . . . (THE SMELL IS OF BRIMSTONE AND BLOOD!)

*The earth at last spits up her dead,  
Pours them out like water,  
And all their bones are out of joint,  
Their hearts dust in their bowels.*

America, from north Canada to the border of Brazil, disintegrates. Exactly five seconds have passed.

The chain is popping its invisible lengths in all directions, radially; spreading with utter swiftness, with implacable sureness, with scientific omniscience. Hawaii and the mid-Pacific islands puff away and under.

*Huge slabs of earth are removed,  
Mountains carried into the sea.  
The salt waters roar,  
And are deeply troubled.  
Woe unto them that are with child  
And to them that give suck this day!*

Twelve seconds have passed.

Twenty thousand men in coal mines and gold mines are caught and crushed; three thousand ships disappear at sea and countless airplanes never land.

Five seconds more and chaos completes itself. The Pyramids of Egypt, Babylonia's hanging gardens, the temple of Diana at Ephesus, the statue of Olympian Zeus, Halikarnassus' mausoleum, the Colossus at Rhodes and the Alexandrian lighthouse are gone. The Sphinx of Memphis, carved of alabaster and weighing over a hundred tons, is dust.

Disintegration divides the scraps of nothing that remain.

It is deathly still. The silence of pre and post creation. A God-like quietude . . .

*Behold, the earth empty, turned upside down  
And scattered the inhabitants thereof.  
Behold, there is no man,  
And the birds of the heaven are fled;  
Behold, the fruitful place is a wilderness.  
This is the rest; and this is the refreshing;  
The poor, the maimed, the halt, the blind  
Instantly consigned*

TO A PEACT THAT PASSETH UNDERSTANDING!

SPIRIT IRONIC:

*"Whee-you!  
Egad! What a show!  
Why, I've watched a world go  
To blazes and hell . . .  
Earth, as long I feared  
Has disappeared,  
And it is quiet . . . there is no sound  
But mine.  
All else has been swallowed into an incalculable design  
Of nescient malign.  
Now what to do?  
I'm washed up . . . FINIS . . . through!  
I almost wish for earth again!  
I lived by man,  
Was born of their first conscious act,  
Their awareness of fact.  
I watched them grapple  
With falsehood;  
I understood  
The good of evil. The world was my apple,  
(Or so I thought).  
Now it's gone . . .  
I am untaught.  
The very idea . . . the, the IRONY!"*

# JOSEPH WHITT

## They Killed Saint Paul at Tre Fontane

*.... begroining juntos cabal tarf  
and blucsick fish uslurp the fleck.*

—Storm Pendrix

How many ways are there of saying it? How many different words to weave and twist, to turn into strange and counter things? It has been preached that they who play with the word shall die by the word. And yet there is the Statue of Liberty, real and solid, standing as if he had never left her. It was Plato who said reality was but a shadow cast on the wall of a cave. He may be right. Still there must be a mass to block the light to form the shadow. Didn't the old gent ever let a cigaret fall over the rail into the wake? It is sucked under the broken water and swirled away.

The ship came to berth. Dockhands, the pilot and the tugboat crews, the captain and the customs officers, all brought Arno Derleth home again.

Some believe you can float your brains in a Martini, or a bucket of champagne, or a keg of Scotch. Arno Derleth tried them all and found them wanting. For in the beginning was the word. There was still the word. Mona and Kopp and Finn and Tris—all were waiting for the word. He was Saint Paul without a gospel. Once he had been Saul of Tarsus. It's only too true, my friend, after Thessalonica everything is just plain Jersey City. The hell with going to the hotel. Let Mona wait. Let them all wait. What they drink on the waterfront explains how Sheikh al Jabal got his assassins to murder the Christian Crusaders.

*"What'll it be, mister?"*

*"Rye."*

*The juke box was playing Danny Boy.*

*"Take a squint at that guy that just rolled in," the man with the black derby muttered.*

*"Some clothes," the man with the big ears said.*

*The black-derby nodded. "Bet he's carryin' a fat roll."*

Arno Derleth did everything precisely on occasions like this. He gazed about for a moment till most of his guests had gathered around the bar. "Friends . . ." He paused gently and let them absorb the face once described as a cross between a Calvinist fire-eater and the whore of Babylon. "Friends, permit me, a toast to Storm Pendrix and his masterpiece, *Epic III*." Derleth surveyed his drawing-room, the faces, the lights, the music. They all blended into what had been a perfect backdrop for the presentation of Storm Pendrix' latest work.

"Arno, come quickly," Mona Bibesco whispered urgently, "Beau and Dicky are at it again."

As they approached the divan, Arno heard, "It's simply preposterous. Assperonia could only be of Greek derivation. Pendrix' affinity for Hellenic myths—"

"That's utter nonsense," Dicky retorted, "it's obviously of Melanesian origin. Arno said so himself and—"

"He did not."

"He did too. What else—" Dicky glanced up and saw Derleth frowning at him. He blushed, stopped short, and then blurted, "Isn't that so Arno. isn't—"

"No Dicky." Derleth cooled off each word. "Assperonia is neither Greek nor Melanesian. It is Egyptian."

Dicky and Beau eyed each other contritely. They recalled what Arno had said about not arguing before all these prominent people. Arno was vexed. Nothing must mar this event. He remembered the detailed and exact preparations: the publishing of fragments in journals and little magazines, the discussions stimulated in literary circles, and the care exercised in selecting the list of guests. There were old friends who had hailed the publication of *Epic I* and *II*, critics, authors, professors, publishers, agents and columnists, all deftly mixed with the devoted members of the Cosmoliterary Society. Arno herded the group away from Dicky and Beau.

A short, oval-shaped man approached him. "Arno," he piped in a thin voice, "there is one thing I'd like to know. Frankly, I'd been in doubt—that is till I talked to this pretty and intelligent young lady." His jowls smiled at Mona. "She has such a keen understanding of Pendrix." Mona sipped her drink and fondled her straight blond hair. "Just what is the significance of this new form?"

"Well, Jeff," Derleth delicately pondered the place Jefferson Q. Kopp occupied in the reviewing world, "it's rather difficult to put it briefly, but Storm Pendrix has developed what I term the pomenovodrama . . ."

Arno spoke fervently. He was a prophet spinning the wonders of a new revelation. The liquor was smooth, the atmosphere was smooth, and Arno was charming. "I believe," he concluded softly, "that Storm Pendrix will stand as the greatest literary figure of the epoch."

The spell was complete. Everything was hushed. Even Mona was carried away, though she had heard this innumerable times before.

Suddenly the web was ripped by a hard prosaic voice. "Listen here, Arno. All that's fine, but since when is obscurity the claim to greatness? No one even understands what he is trying to say. Fragments pieced together with a pot of glue don't make a work of art."

Arno was irritated. He disliked the Micky Finn, always probing with his obvious and dull questions. Finn was an important critic for, what Dicky called, the hyperthyroid press. Arno answered politely: "For a complex age Pendrix has created complex images. A sensitive soul is seared by our mechanistic and decadent world. In order to escape this defilement, Pendrix left America and retired to Walbourgsgarten. He sees no one and keeps in touch with the world through me. It is a heroic sacrifice by a heroic artist . . ."

No member of the Cosmoliterary Society asked questions. They merely glanced at those near them, and when Arno stressed a phrase, they nodded their heads wisely and murmured, "Hmm, a good point."

Derleth grew a bit uneasy when he saw Finn speaking to Tristram Poulsen. He would have felt uneasier had he heard Micky say, "How do you put up with it Tris? That scene's just one person reflected in fifty mirrors. Seems like regimentation begins in the salon." Arno did not care to see Micky and Tris so friendly. As it was, Tris was becoming the least dependable member of the Society. He noticed that they shook hands before Micky went to the cloakroom.

Arno was speaking to Mrs. van Druten, the financial angel of a publishing house, when Kopp came up grinning. "Congratulations, old chap. Really I feel like wiring Storm Pendrix himself. Mona was showing me the proofs of your commentary, I hope you don't mind—it cleared up all my doubts. A fine piece of work."

"Thanks," Arno smiled. He envisioned the five hundred thousand readers of Kopp's magazine. "It's a pleasure hearing that from you, Jeff."

Kopp walked back to the library with Mona.

"Look at him soak 'em up, willya?" big-ears said.

The black-derby chewed his cigar and nodded.

"Gonna git drunker 'n a coot."

*Big-ears and the black-derby looked into each other's eyes and sipped their beers.*

## II

"Let Pendrix come out from behind his pornographic charades . . . sheer exhibitionism . . . anagrammatic gibberish . . ." Arno couldn't read any further. He flung the newspaper across the room. He pounded off the words pacing the floor. "Delirium tremens in four-letter words . . . hothouse cult of confusionism . . ." Micky Finn had launched a one-man crusade against Storm Pendrix.

He shouldn't let what Finn wrote upset him so. After all, who would listen to that raucous phrasemonger. Finn was the last of the dying philistines. Arno caressed the phrase—last of the dying philistines. This wasn't the early years. Battering the encrusted prejudices, compelling them to accept Pendrix, to recognize his genius. Fifteen years devoted to Pendrix. *The Open Sesame to Epic I.* Articles. Lectures, Polemics. Victory came slow, but now he was recognized as the authority on Pendrix and the canaille was left with one croaking spokesman. He should write an epitaph for Finn. Still it was rather strange about the other reviews. Most of them hadn't dealt with Pendrix yet. A few had praised, some reserved final judgment, but the majority were silent. Of course he should expect that. It was more complex than the first two volumes. They'd have difficulty understanding. The multi-overtones of secondary and tertiary allusions. The Chinese, the Sanskrit and the thirteen other languages that interlaced three thousand years of history, myth and folklore. No it wasn't easy. Even he was lost in spots. Uncertain passages. Words he couldn't decipher. Why had Finn kept harping on canto sixty-three? Why hadn't Tris' review appeared? Say, Arno, did you hear the cracks Finn made on his radio program? You say Dicky's been seen with Finn? He needs a talking to. Kopp's isn't due for ten days. He'll put all of them in their place. Sveen writes that Pendrix is working on a new project. What a biography Sveen should be able to write some day; the personal

secretary to Storm Pendrix for twenty years. Hello Arno, did you hear about Tris? Sure it's true. Strange, why hasn't Mona called? *The Phenix* is going to blast it. They can't. What's that? You read Tris' article? What about Kopp? We'll just have to wait, no sense in antagonizing him. Above all not him. Mona darling, be a good little girl and pay Kopp a social visit. Of course I don't believe those rumors about you, don't be silly. I didn't know Tris had gone as far as that. We'd better call a meeting.

Arno's tired eyes stared at the varied expressions of the members of the Cosmoliterary Society. Cigaret smoke filled the room. Tris sat in the rear, calmly puffing his pipe. Arno was speaking. "Mr. Poulsen has explained absolutely nothing so far. Perhaps he would care to say something in his own defense."

"I need no defense," Tris said slowly. "I wrote the review because I think Pendrix has gone off the deep end, from obscurity to navel contemplation. He's stewing in his own juice. As a writer he has the right to his idiot's delight, but as an ordinary human being he must accept the responsibility of his views and not hide beneath the artist's cloak—"

"Plebian nonsense!" Mona blurted.

"Next you'll be seeking social significance!"

Arno seized the advantage. "Yes, it certainly seems that Mr. Poulsen has joined the philistines; at any moment we can expect him to flaunt his membership card, signed by President Finn."

"We've fought such bigotries—"

"Only to create others."

"You betray true art and drag it into the muck of partisan politics. You don't comprehend the cosmic—"

"To hell with your oiled words, Arno," Tris snapped. "Why doesn't Pendrix speak out for himself? Let him explain—"

Arno gasped. "Explain? Are we to annoy him with the doubts of fools? Are we to stoop to their ignorance?"

The discussion dissolved into small groups. Several gathered around Tris, assailing him with witty barbs, banderillos of sarcasm and mockery. Beau and Dicky were bathing a women's-journal critic in a stream of words. And Arno wandered among all of them, adding a comment here, underscoring another point there. The crackling hum of voices flowed through his body. It seemed to swell into a sonorous hymn. It gave him strength. To be true unto one's faith in the face of the heathen. His returned assurance seeped into the others. They closed their ranks. The enemy had momentarily broken through, but he had been repelled. And Arno had been the leader.

Dicky shouldn't mix drinks like this; I'll tell him.

"My name ain't Dicky, mister. I'm the bartender."

"Who're you if I'm Saint Paul?"

*It happened on the road to Damascus, after the riot and the bloodshed. And He asked Paul, why persecutest thou me? Paul saw the glory and was blinded and they led him to live among the Christians. That's how he got faith. But what if there were no gospel, no Jesus to quote?*

"Listen to 'im," the black-derby said, "it'll be a cinch, I tellya."

"Yeh, but—"

"Ya gettin' yella? Ya seen the chunk he's carryin', like takin' candy off a baby."

*Big-ears gulped his beer.*

Arno lay back on the twisted pillow. Everything seemed to get in his way: the cover slipped, the pajamas tugged, the mattress jabbed his ribs. He squirmed and turned. Finally he gave up trying to fall asleep. So what if those two did resign with Tris? The others were solid. Writing columns and reviews. Kopp was still to be heard from. Who said Kopp was seen with Finn and Tris? Arno lit a cigaret, slipped out of bed and walked into the study.

The room was filled with a cool quiet, it soothed his ragged nerves. He lit the desk lamp and sagged back in the armchair. Through the cigarette smoke he peered up at the portrait hanging on the wall. Pendrix: tense, squinting, the ascetic mustache, the tapered fingers of the folded hands. A Chinese mandarin with an ageless face. He had been so proud when he received it seven years ago. Straight from Walbourgsgarten with a personal note. Pendrix was a complex genius. Interesting how he developed his style, how it filtered into his letters. At first direct and simple: *December 15th, Dear Arno... enclosed find mss... your friend, Storm.* Then more involved: *deararnodeath... why if alicenot... stormpentrix. Febsnowary... arnoderclictus... mort au pen and spuminjune... R No DERLETHAL... M Rots Xirdnep. April 10th, His master is engrossed in his work. He sends his regrets for not writing personally, Sveen.* Real genius, body and spirit, everyday life and creative work fused inseparably in his art. A good point to remember for the biography. Tris had his gall wanting to bother this Titan. But Kopp wants to know, he wants Pendrix to issue a statement. Passage in the eighty-ninth canto: it was stirrly trinaffy begroining juntos cabal tarf and bluesick fish upslurp the fleck. It's perfectly clear. It means phlentxri. Yet it could also be the Vedantic view of reality. Yes. Yes, of course it must mean that. What else? Take it easy you're just tired. It's very simple. So clear. A permanent record in cuneiform for Hammurabi under layers of excavation. Hello what are you doing here, King Kopp in leaves of gold five hundred thousand sheaves of gold worth more dead than alive and my father was a Pharoah and he said if I was bad he'd get that mean cop after me, the one with the big fat belly canto cantering clippity-clop to the barbershop to buy a piece of candy banging on the head Clippity-clop...

Arno's eyes cracked with pounding light. He glanced around, bewildered, blinking. The desk lamp was lit. Someone was knocking on the door.

"Arno, wake up, it's Mona."

"All right. All right. Here I come." He opened the door and Mona flopped in dejectedly.

"Kopp..." She slumped into the armchair. Even before he pulled the magazine from under her arm, Arno realized what had happened. It was open to the book section. He couldn't get himself to read it.

There was a moment of silence. Arno lit a cigaret for Mona and himself. His gestures had an exaggerated calmness in contrast to the tremolo in his voice. "I'm going to see Pendrix, Mona. I'm flying to Walbourgsgarten immediately." She tried to say something. He anticipated. "No, please don't tell me I shouldn't. It's for his sake. He must answer his assassins."

### III

"Ya got things straight, aintcha?" the black-derby said.

"Yeh, sure—"

"OK, but don't go screwin' me up."

"Just don't fergit, we splits it fifty-fifty."

*Hashshashin. The magic lives inside of the word. From hashish-eater to assassin, more than eight hundred years and Sheikh al Jabal and his Ishmaelite Christian-murderers still sing their fanatical high-pitched songs on the island of Manhattan. The faithful die and the heathen thrive. What did Nero pay the two men who did the job at Tre Fontane? Does anyone remember their names?*

They knew Arno Derleth. Passengers saw his name on the list and felt proud to be traveling on the same boat. They asked the steward to point him out in the dining-hall. Why Mr. Derleth, what a pleasure to meet you. I'm Jones of the Sun. We hear you've been to see Pendrix and the entire literary world envies you. What did he have to say?

The huge walled estate was perched high on a rocky crag. An eagle's perch. As formidable as the very idea of going to see Pendrix. Decisions and indecisions chopped each other down. What would Pendrix think or feel or say? What would he care about the howling rabble on the outside? Walbourgsgarten was another world. The cathedral-like spires crowded the sky and in the distance was the house surrounded by phalanxes of tall firs. Arno pushed the button at the gate and waited. The granite walls were monuments. He was an humble pilgrim who had trod the road on hands and knees. It was nearly five minutes before a man came to the gate. He was lean, grey and Nordic.

"I'm Arno Derleth. I've come to see Mr. Pendrix."

"Sorry, sir, but the master is seeing no one." The man's eyes were blue and flat.

"But if you tell him who I am, I'm sure—or his secretary, Mr. Sveen."

"I am Mr. Sveen. I am indeed sorry, Mr. Derleth, but no one may disturb the master."

"But I must. You don't understand, it's urgent—"

"There is nothing I can do, sir." He clipped his words, turned sharply and walked back up the driveway.

This was a nightmare. This couldn't be. Yet what was more nightmarish than climbing over the wall and sneaking about like a common thief. And here he was doing just that, stepping through a window into a huge oak-paneled room. For our faith we do things we would never dream of doing for ourselves. He had come to protect Storm Pendrix from the followers of Sheikh al Jabal. The heathen hordes. Or the men of Nero. They could be stopped with the sign, they could be stopped with the word. Pendrix would give the word and he would bear it back for the world to understand. Epistles from Walbourgsgarten beside those from Thessalonica and Corinth.

"You shouldn't have broken in, Mr. Derleth. You shouldn't have done it. Now you know." Sveen's face was sad and bony.

No, he should not have broken in.

To seek without finding is faith. To find is death. On a ship going home with living people, smiling, eating, loving, hating, people—which is the shadow, which the substance? How many ways to smash, to change and rearrange the word? From the Greek, *para*, meaning beside, and *hiemi*, meaning let go, or do you prefer meningo-encephalitis leading to a degeneration of the parenchyma? The wardmen at the City Hospital are simple gents—they call it softening of the brain: limp and soft and sagging, melting taffy in the sun in his bony chalice I bring the host bring the host in the beginning was the word...

*They say it was a sunny day at Tre Fontane, just two miles south of the city. It was a sunny day, so bright, so new, yet they beheaded Paul and made him a saint.*

"Finish your drink," the man with the black derby whispered, "he's gettin' ready to go."

## ***DELL SKEELS***

### ***Song***

*On the sharp rise between the floors her gentle Eyes accuse, her lips intrude, sing syllables, Rudders, naval supplies, a bed for two The light winks red, winks white, winks blue, Floor three, press back, trust to the wall, On me trust, good sirs, step up, step Steeply up your angled emptiness, See green, spew blood within a running cup, Now drown our dental innocence well douched, Floor five and Styx the doctors made surmise Cross toss of time in space, face forward, Tucked in the night mother mime ope now Thy fluttering cankerous legs and heart Down under down, yet shall be won To troglodyte heroics and a sweetened stone Compressed within our mutual bowels make light.*

# *FRED HAMANN*

## *Three Leaves Scratch On My Porch*

*Twayblades have withered,  
summer yesterdays  
flown with the quail.  
The 'possum creeps softly  
through the dark  
persimmon grove.*

*It is fall  
and three leaves  
scratch on my porch.*

*Tonight there will be rime  
on the twig-strewn parklawns  
at moonset,  
stars over stubble  
and last summer's sap  
congealed in the heartwood.*

*I remember walking lightly  
under sleeping palms  
in Kissimee.*

*I remember stepping blithely  
over magnolia shadows  
in Hushpuckana  
and Moon.*

*Here already  
it is fall  
and three leaves  
scratch on my porch.*

# KENNETH O. HANSON

## Some Notes For a Practical Poesy

### I

Poems are made of words—not fancy thought nor dream nor the poet's overflowing heart nor a genteel perception. This word is unit, a physical fact like a brick, having a certain look on the page, made up of a certain number of familiar sound-symbols.

The word as fact works ambiguously, which is the other half of its nature, the organic half. Words operate in context. No word is ever the same twice because the context changes. Experience is not repeated.

The poet, recognizing word as fact and ambiguity, travels a landscape whose features are unstable. The word to link landscape and plot is the poet's chance (chance i.e., opportunity *plus* risk). The good poet calculates his risk, that is to say, he knows what he's doing.

### 2

The poet's responsibility is to himself and the language. Any conscious striving to "communicate" confuses object and origin, the causal sequence. If the poet establishes an honest relationship between the poem and himself, it will communicate, though not necessarily to every reader. To establish such a relationship ought to be the poet's concern. The rest follows from this.

### 3

Poems are not to be read as analogues to other poems. The poet does not perform someone else's music.

Poetry comes before criticism, as Innocence before the Fall.  
Or to vary the figure, most critics muddy the stream.

### 4

Metaphor is approximate because no thing ever *equals* anything *else*. The poet should not be expected to point out the degree of approximation, although there may be special advantages in doing so. A comparison may be slow-breaking and become obvious as the poem works, or it may be immediately effective and immediately modified by second or third comparisons. In this connection a poem by Donne or Crashaw is not the same thing as one by Hart Crane or Rimbaud.

The poet who lets his reader perceive for himself the precision of an image will frequently be disappointed. The reader may, for one reason or another, be unable to intuit and share certain areas of experience native to the poet. Hence the confusion of the critic before a glass in which he does not appear.

"(The ordinary man) falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes." T. S. Eliot.

"... whatever reader desires to have a thorough comprehension of an author's thoughts, cannot take a better method than by putting himself into the circumstances and postures of life, that the writer was in upon every important passage, as it flowed from his pen: For this will introduce a parity, and strict correspondence of ideas, between the reader and the author. Now, to assist the diligent reader in so delicate an affair, as far as brevity will permit, I have recollected, that the shrewdest pieces of this treatise were conceived in bed in a garret; at other times (for a reason best known to myself) I thought fit to sharpen my invention with hunger; and in general, the whole work was begun, continued, and ended, under a long course of physic, and a great want of money." Dean Swift.

The danger to contemporary poetry does not come from the direction of obscurity. The poet who accepts a personal discipline in the form of a limiting technique at one stroke places himself at a distance from many readers, but is not for that reason the less poet. The hack whose playboy fancy rides the coattails of obscurantist fads may dupe guileless readers in the beginning, but sooner or later the fraud will out.

The real danger is twofold: romantic vagary in flotsam words, the poet in a rapt ecstatic trance, a bloating swoon, an emotive elephantiasis; and the infection of glibness, the poet as an intellectual matinee idol, top man in a collar ad. By reducing questions, answers are made easy. The poet does not achieve intensity by refusing to note the variables in an equation, nor does he achieve scope by echolalia. To reduce is not the same thing as to limit. The focus implies periphery.

A sonnet, however structurally deficient, wears pattern as objective *proof* of form. This is the herring that clues too many readers home. It is more difficult to recognize structure in the *Cantos* or the love songs of Mina Loy, which is not to say structure is less important there.

Structure is a matter of the poetic vision. Form is external. Mastery of form is a discipline. Form itself is *one* of the devices by which structure may be achieved, not the only one.

Picasso paints as he does because he cannot draw?

The *Cantos* lack structure because Pound has not mastered form?

"Ecstasy affords the occasion and expediency determines the form."  
Marianne Moore.

There are also other occasions.

It is necessary for the poet to be conscious of his time. It is impossible to ignore Copernicus, Darwin, Freud, the diabolism of fascist dogma, the unrest of relativist thought, the *malaise* of the individual. There is no point in repeating the worst of last century's verse.

To be contemporary is to live in the dilemma. Those who point to Science as a "way out" confuse nuclear physics with the principle of the wheel. Perhaps the reality is that there is no way out.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, CIRCULATION, ETC., REQUIRED BY THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF MARCH 3, 1933 AND JULY 2, 1946, of INTERIM, published four issues per volume at Seattle, Washington, for May 1948.

State of Washington,  
County of King.

Before me, a notary public in and for the state and county aforesaid, personally appeared A. Wilber Stevens, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says he is the editor of Interim and that the following is, to best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of ownership and management of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the act of August 24, 1912, as amended by the acts of March 3, 1933, and July 2, 1946 (Section 437, P. L. & R.) to wit:

1. That the name, address, of the publisher, editor, managing editor and business manager is A. Wilber Stevens, Seattle, Washington.
2. That the owner is A. Wilber Stevens, Seattle, Washington.
3. That the known bond holders, mortgagees, and other securities holders holding or owning 1% or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, are: None.
4. That the two paragraphs next above, giving the name of the owner, stockholder, and security holder, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears on the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting, is given, also that the two said paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association, or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him.

A. WILBER STEVENS.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 12th day of May, 1948.

JAMES M. DODSON, Notary Public,  
My commission expires Aug. 30, 1949.

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A complete Index of Volumes I, II and  
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